U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Family and Youth Services Bureau

THE EXCHANGE

News from FYSB and the Youth Services Field

May 1999

Supporting Youth by Educating Communities

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDPA), and reauthorization of that legislation once again is under discussion. The JJDPA has largely achieved the goals established by Congress as part of its passage. It is, perhaps, one of the few bills to create real change in the way State and local communities do business. As a result of the Act's key mandates, which were linked to formula grant funding to participating States, fewer young people are being held in adult jails and lockups, status offenders are no longer being held in detention facilities, and we are beginning to focus on why so many minority youth end up in juvenile justice system facilities and what to do about it.

Yet the Act is under fire. Up for reauthorization for more than 2½ years, the legislation appears to be a lightening rod for discussions about juvenile crime (which is down), violence (acts of which are committed by a small percentage of the population), and youth activities such as midnight basketball (which got caught in the crossfire during discussions over the Crime Bill of 1994).

Moreover, at a time when this country is doing well (the economy is healthy, people are employed, and the Nation enjoys relative security), we appear unable to commit sufficient energy or resources to improving the lives of all children and youth. This despite poll after poll that shows that most Americans are willing to do whatever is necessary to support youth and to deter them from involvement with drugs, gangs, and delinquency. (As part of a recent poll of 800 registered voters by a national foundation, for example, 80 percent of respondents said that

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Secretary Shalala Gives Address on Youth-Related Policy

In addition to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended (JJDPA), a number of legislative initiatives related to young people and families have been under consideration during the current session of the U.S. Congress. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala discussed the reauthorization of the JJDPA, and youth- and family-related initiatives included in the Administration's fiscal year 2000 budget, during an address to youth service professionals:

"It's a pleasure for me to join you today as you mark the 25th anniversary of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and celebrate

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Message to the FYSB Grantees From the FYSB Associate Commissioner

More than 25 years ago, key national leaders began exploring how to more effectively respond to the needs of young people in troubled situations. The result: the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974, which was crafted with the important input of small local agencies serving youth who had run away from home.

This landmark legislation triggered a sea change in how this country responded to the needs of youth in at-risk situations and resulted in critical juvenile justice system improvements. These included the removal of young people from adult jails, the deinstitutionalization of status offenders, and, of course, the creation of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB).

Today, I am pleased to serve as the FYSB Associate Commissioner as we stand on the precipice of the next wave of change. It is a time that presents us with both opportunities and challenges.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the passage of the JJDPA, we must continue the valuable, but demanding, work of educating people about the contributions young people are capable of and can make to this country when they are supported, engaged, and respected.

These are exciting times for FYSB and its grantees. First, the Administration has made improving supports to children, youth, and families a priority. The President's budget for fiscal year 2000 contains several new initiatives for supporting youth transitioning from foster care. Equally important is the Administration's request for a 33-percent increase in funding for FYSB's Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth.

We must continue the valuable, but demanding, work of educating people about the contributions of young people.

Second, FYSB and other Federal agencies are working diligently to promote collaboration at the national level on behalf of young people. These partnerships will enable us to streamline youth policy at the national level, promote the youth development approach to serving youth, and help local communities build a continuum of care for children, youth, and families.

Finally, there is increasing national support for the youth development approach in helping young people, especially those in high-risk situations, to become happy, healthy, and contributing adults. FYSB has been working with other Federal agencies and national organizations to continue to promote consideration of this approach by policymakers, foundations, and others. In November 1998, FYSB provided grants to nine States to develop strategies for implementing the youth development approach statewide.

Even if each of those events was occurring in isolation, they would give us hope for a better future for young people in this country. The potential combined effect of these efforts will enhance our collective efforts to make a real difference in the lives of young people.

I look forward to working with all of you.

Gilda Lambert
Associate Commissioner
FYSB

10 Little Things That You Can Do for Youth Next Year

Often big changes can result from a series of small steps carried out over a period of years. The following are relatively simple actions that youth service providers might carry out during the next year to positively affect young people and youth policy:

- Keep FYSB and other Federal agencies informed about which national initiatives might benefit your community.
- Talk to one young person per week to find out their opinions regarding what they need from adults.
- Each month, share the perspective of one young person regarding what youth need from adults with funders, media outlets, or decisionmakers.
- Respond to every request for information you receive about your program and the young people you serve.
- Put extra effort into ensuring that agency staff are friendly, helpful, and professional with all those they contact or who contact them.
- Share all new youth-related publications that the agency receives with all staff; select the best materials for use as part of staff development training.
- Examine whether the agency is providing young people serving in leadership positions (such as on the board) with enough training and support.
- Encourage agency staff to have a dialog with five friends or relatives this year about the myths and realities of adolescence and about ways that they can support young people.

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they would be willing to pay additional taxes to offer after-school programs to young people.[1])

Frustratingly, we remain deadlocked in a debate over the best way to support young people, particularly those in difficult circumstances. The exhausting prevention versus punishment deliberation continues despite what we know about both options. Research has shown that dollars invested on the front end (prevention, developmental opportunities, and early intervention) prevent the need for much larger investments on the back end (drug treatment and incarceration).[2] Studies have shown that what really helps young people stay on track is the support of a loving adult.[3] Common sense tells us that long-term gains are best actualized when short-term problems are prevented. Supporting young people is an area in which research, practice, and our collective understanding about life appear to merge into a single perspective.

It is therefore a perplexing time. On the one hand, we know more clearly than ever the true direction that communities must take: creating a continuum of care that focuses on helping all young people and their families achieve their potential. Conversely, we are unable to move forward, caught in the mire of political discourse and without the courageous leadership necessary to create networks of young people and adults working together to build strong communities across the country. The challenge that lies ahead is how to take what we know, confirm what we suspect, learn more about what still stymies us, and move forward with conviction.

A Time for Change

Just as so many youth agencies have opted to transform their services during the past decade, with many moving to the youth development approach, we must revolutionize the public discourse about youth and family issues. There is no longer room for political remarks that engender good will but create little action. Gone from the vocabulary should be pat phrases such as "children are our most valuable resource" or "young people are our future." In their stead should be language that sets things in motion, creating momentum for long term and fundamental change.

The discussion concerning the JJDPA, therefore, must be linked to conversation about how best to help youth, especially those in at-risk circumstances, achieve positive outcomes. Since it appears that most Americans support the notion of providing ample resources to care for children and youth, that discussion must focus on the real barriers that have prevented this Nation from building an effective continuum of care for children, youth, and families. The primary barrier may have more to do with our society's conventional wisdom about life passages in general, and adolescence in particular, than we want to admit.

The cultural stereotype about adolescence, in fact, assumes the worst about this life stage and young people themselves. Society views adolescence as inevitable and painful for both young people and adults around them. We hear the negative assumptions in our conversations: "Well, what can

[1]For more information, see the Mott Foundation's home page on the Internet's World Wide Web: <www.mott.org>.

[2]See, for example, P. Greenwood and others, *Diverting Children From a Life of Crime: Measuring Costs and Benefits*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996.

[3]M.D. Resnick and others. "Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health." In *Journal of the American Medical Association* 278: 10 (September 10, 1997).

you expect? She's a teenager" or "You work with teens? You must be a saint."

This prevailing wisdom to "expect the worst" from young people often exists even in communities where young people grow up in the best of circumstances. Such thinking can result in a reinforcing cycle: adults misinterpret young people's behaviors, youth respond defensively to the criticism or negative attitudes they perceive, and, as a result, adults' negative opinions about youth become even more solidified. This negative chain of events is especially likely when adults are themselves struggling to gain a sense of identity and therefore take young people's challenges personally. It also occurs when adults assume that the reality for youth today is the same as it was when the adults were young.

Further, in communities in which youth grow up in difficult circumstances, we both expect the worst *and* want to hold them accountable for their behavior, despite their exposure to violence, drugs, and exploitation. We seldom, however, give them credit for their unique means of surviving such abuse and neglect; instead we move them through institutions ill designed to support their development. These youth emerge much worse for the wear. Our silent reaction: "What can you expect from a teenager from that background?"

One of the most important tasks for the year ahead, therefore, is to begin the process of shifting public notions about adolescence. Changing public views will require an emphasis on educating people about human development at all stages of life. It also will mean facilitating greater public discussion of such topics as the dynamics of human potential, the interrelationships between personal and environmental influences, and the range of age-related experiences we now define as life passages.

Key to those discussions will be putting to rest some old myths about what it means to be young and old and every age in between. Our images of adolescence especially will need retooling, beginning with some realities of adolescence that are not commonly understood and that run counter to popular stereotypes:

- **Adolescence does not have to be a difficult life stage.** Research and the experience of youth professionals indicates that a certain amount of experimentation occurs among all adolescents, sometimes involving risky behaviors. When young people have access to developmental opportunities, however, they are more likely to avoid the kinds of problem behaviors that put them or others at serious risk.

  Adolescence is, by definition, a period in which individuals are growing and changing. While their development is positive, change can cause uncertainty for both young people and adults. When adults understand and are able to accept the changes that accompany adolescence as natural and normal, rather than becoming anxious or defensive, they usually can offer the supportive presence young people need to make a relatively smooth transition to adulthood.

- **Young people do want adult attention.** One of the major developmental tasks of adolescents is individuation. This is the process through which youth develop a sense of self separate from their parents or caretakers while remaining connected to them as a source of emotional support, empathy, and practical advice. They also begin to spend more time with peers who allow them the freedom to operate independently. Parents and other adults sometimes experience adolescent individuation as a rejection of their norms and ideas or a lack

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of desire to spend time with adults. Most youth, in fact, want to spend time talking with adults; they just want to redefine that communication process to meet their changing needs.

- **Disagreement is not always a challenge to authority.** Sometimes adolescents question adult points of view to test their newfound intellectual abilities, rather than because they are rejecting adult direction or value systems. During adolescence, the brain grows rapidly and young people progress from the concrete thought of childhood (thinking only about real or known objects) to the logical thought of adulthood (which allows them to, for example, compare concepts or make suppositions on the basis of known facts). The ability to use logical thought enables young people to reflect on and construct meaning from their interactions with others, formulate a social and ethical code, and develop intellectually.

  Arguments and discussions with adults, therefore, can be indicators that young people are learning to reason and think for themselves. Since differing opinions are a fact of life, adults can use these times to help youth develop their capacity to build consensus or work toward compromise.

- **Peer groups are an important part of adolescent development.** Peer groups often are assumed to be negative influences, perhaps because people, young and old, do tend to engage in different behaviors when part of a group. Young people who have relationships with caring adults, however, appear more able to resist pressure to engage in activities that contradict their values or place them or others at risk.

  Moreover, relationships with peers help young people develop a sense of belonging outside their family of origin. With their peers, adolescents learn to develop and maintain relationships. Those relationships give them sources, other than their family, of advice, protection, and companionship.

- **Communication with young people works best when it is not always problem focused.** When supervisors take time to speak with staff only when there is a serious problem, most employees become quite wary of sharing their real feelings or asking for help. Similarly, the best way to engage young people may be through the everyday informal conversations that adults are used to holding with friends and partners. Through these interactions, adults can build trust, convey to youth that they respect and value their input, and create sharing relationships that enable youth to turn to them for advice and support when they need it.

- **Young people want to contribute to the community.** While time with peers is important to adolescents, they also have a tremendous capacity for involvement in activities that improve the lives of others and of their communities. While it may appear at times that youth care only about their friends, most young people are interested in contributing to the well-being of their families and the greater community, especially when they are invited to do so. A 1996 study for the Independent Sector conducted by The Gallup Organization found that 59 percent of youth ages 12–17 had volunteered during the previous year for an average of 3.5 hours per week and that 41 percent of youth had contributed to charitable organizations during the previous year. Further, youth were four times as likely to volunteer

if they were asked to do so than if they were not.[4]

Educating Key Community Sectors About Young People

Obviously, changing the way young people are perceived by adults must occur before this country can effectively begin to support youth and families. Our attitudes control our interactions with youth, our willingness to rethink how we support them, and our commitment to devoting the resources necessary to do so adequately.

Youth service professionals are in a unique position to begin the process of helping community members rethink adolescence. Most youth professionals already have begun the process of educating other social service professionals about the youth development approach to working with young people. (See the December 1998 edition of *The Exchange*, FYSB's quarterly update to the youth service field, regarding strategies for building consensus on the youth development approach.) Moreover, they have ties to representatives from all walks of life, including academics, researchers, policymakers, business leaders, and parents. Each of these groups can play a key role in shifting public perception about young people.

The following steps provide an approach youth service professionals can take to begin a process for adjusting the perception of adolescence in this country. This process can be carried out in conjunction with the strategy for building consensus about youth development, or separately.

Step 1: Develop an Action Plan.

Most public relations firms will tell you that simply educating the public about a key issue is no longer enough. To effect change, a good education campaign must refocus people's attitudes and behavior. Doing so means first finding out what people think about a topic and then engaging key players in developing strategies for helping people think and act differently.

One option is to meet with community members who represent key constituency groups, such as the leader of the local business community, a university representative, or a local school administrator. As part of your initial meeting (see step 2), you will determine what they currently think about young people. You also will let them know that you are beginning to formulate a plan for shifting public perception about youth and for encouraging community members to engage young people in positive community activities.

Begin by identifying key community members whose opinions matter and who have the desire to help. Think through the reasons they have for potentially becoming involved in your effort, the possible downside they might see for their involvement, and strategies for addressing potential negative results for them of their involvement. In some communities, for example, excessive media coverage of crime might cause a local politician who advocates greater services and support for young people to be labeled as "soft on crime." By showing them how to help the public understand that in most areas crime is down, you may be able to enlist their support.

Step 2: Interview Key Community Members.

Meet with the key people you identified in step 1 to discuss how the community's young people are perceived. Get their perspective regarding the most critical issues and obstacles to be addressed in helping the community begin to think about

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[4]Independent Sector. *Volunteering and Giving Among Teenagers 12 to 17 Years of Age*. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 1997.

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adolescence as a stage similar to all life passages (that is, a time of change and growth accompanied by both successes and challenges). "Engaging Key Leaders in Discussing Young People" on page 10 provides questions you can use to conduct these discussions.

After hearing from them about the most important barriers to changing attitudes about young people, and the messages that might be effective in overcoming those, ask their advice about how to effectively share those messages with their colleagues. Then see whether they would be willing to participate in a short pilot test to determine the effectiveness of the approach they suggest, or another that you identify through your discussion. The following are some examples of potential pilot test activities that could be conducted for a defined period:

- A business leader might use upcoming meetings to discuss with colleagues their perceptions of youth as employees and how they might begin to offer opportunities for young people to build effective work skills and habits.
- A researcher might agree to make the case to colleagues (for example, by making presentations or publishing articles through local or regional associations of researchers) of the need for studies that foster understanding of the current and potential contributions of young people. A researcher also could highlight for others in the field the importance of involving youth service providers and young people in selecting the focus of youth-related research.
- A policymaker might agree to mention in each speech to other local policymakers one area in which adolescents contribute positively to the community.
- A member of the media might encourage other local media personnel to examine their coverage of juvenile delinquency and young people in general. The media professional could provide examples of stories that share the positive contributions of young people. They also could discuss how, when negative stories about youth must be run, these can include information for the community on how to get involved in supporting youth.

In implementing the pilot test, seek the assistance of a full-service public relations firm (one that is able to conduct polling, carry out media campaigns, manage public education efforts, and evaluate campaign effectiveness, for example). The role of public relations specialists will be to plan and manage a process for testing changes in youth-related attitudes within each of your key contact's peer groups or constituencies during the life of the pilot project. Comparing baseline responses about youth with followup responses at the end of the agreed period will help establish the effectiveness of each strategy.

Keep the timeframe of the pilot test short, from 6 weeks to 3 months, to make the participation of those you interview more likely. Get their commitment to work with the public relations firm and to share the results of their activities with you and the others involved in the pilot test at the end of the project.

Step 3: Follow Up With Your Contacts.

Follow up with each of the community members you interviewed to thank them for their time and reiterate the role they have agreed to play in the pilot test. Then arrange for the public relations firm to work with them to test opinions among their colleagues or constituencies, as appropriate. Let the key contact who you interviewed know that you will check in with them in 1 month to ask about how things are going or what types of support they might need that they did not anticipate. Be sure to

call each person periodically throughout the pilot test.

Step 4: Analyze the Results of the Pilot Project.

At the conclusion of the agreed period, arrange for the public relations firm to conduct followup research regarding youth-related attitudes in each target group. Be sure that followup interviews include enough questions to determine not only whether a target audience's opinions changed, but why they did so.

Then have the public relations specialists assist you in reviewing and/or interpreting the results to determine, for example, which opinions about youth were most common; which approaches were most successful in bringing about positive changes in attitudes; which strategies brought about less dramatic change, but among a greater number of people; and which had no effect.

If you have a research intern, you may want to create a searchable database through which you can analyze the results of the pilot test quickly. Prepare a report or series of overheads summarizing the findings of the pilot test that you can distribute or present at the followup meeting.

Step 5: Host a Followup Meeting.

Bring together the individuals who participated in the pilot project. Together with the public relations specialist(s), share the findings of the pilot test and invite each person to briefly share their experience, outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations for next steps. Engage the group in brainstorming how to proceed:

- Analyze the results of the pilot test to assess the strategies used and determine what alternative approaches or messages might be more effective.
- Help each person identify a core group of supporters within their constituency and determine how to use that group to expand the work of the pilot project to a broader audience.
- Identify important knowledge gaps that will require future efforts, such as the need to better educate parents about the standard physiological changes of adolescence, and determine who can help.
- Consider setting up subcommittees led by key members of the pilot project to manage future efforts identified by the group. Further, explore the possibility of having the public relations firm commit to helping the group expand the pilot project.
- Arrange a time to meet again to assess progress toward goals and address implementation issues.

Ongoing efforts to change community attitudes about young people are, of course, a means to a larger end: helping to build public policy that supports the positive development of all youth (see "Designing Sound Youth Policy" on page 12). That is, better understanding of young people and the adolescent life stage within communities usually is a precursor to, rather than a result of, improved youth policy and programming. Further, providing all youth in a community the support and developmental opportunities they need is usually beyond the means of even the most well-funded youth service agency; rather, it requires broad community involvement.

As a result, today a core task of all of those who serve youth and families is to lead efforts to further educate communities about young people. These efforts can help lay the foundation for a future in which communities provide the support young people need and youth, in turn, contribute to stronger communities.

Engaging Key Leaders in Discussing Young People

Leaders of professional groups and community institutions often have valuable insights into the views about young people among influential individuals and groups that in turn can affect the dominant attitudes in the community. The following are questions that youth service professionals can use to begin a dialog about young people with professionals from different disciplines:

Policymakers

- What do you think is the prevailing perception of young people in this community?
- How does that perception affect your ability to enhance youth policy and practice?
- What strategies do you think are necessary to shift negative perceptions of youth?
- How might we further promote positive perceptions of young people?
- What do we need to do to involve young people in helping to resolve the major problems the community faces?
- How can we help young people learn what it is to be good citizens and contributing community members?
- How often are you able to meet with young people to simply listen, ask questions, or encourage them to share their ideas about the community?

Researchers

- What do you think is the prevailing perception of young people in this community?
- How do you think research and evaluation studies have contributed to that perception?
- What types of research or evaluation studies might be designed that would help foster greater understanding of young people, their needs, and their potential contributions?
- What process do you use to decide on the focus of youth-related research that you conduct? How have you involved youth service practitioners in that process?
- How can youth service providers assist you in providing context for research or evaluation findings that otherwise might have negative consequences for young people and their families?
- What role might youth agency staff play in assisting you in designing evaluations that provide ongoing feedback to agency leaders?
- How might youth service providers be helpful as you consider the possible impact of the outcomes of your research on local, State, or national policies that affect, or could affect, young people?
- How often are you able to meet with young people to encourage them to share their ideas about research on adolescent issues?

Business Leaders

- What is the perception of the business community with regard to young people in this community?
- What strategies do you think are necessary to shift any negative perceptions about youth as employees?
- What needs to happen to ensure that this community will have an adequately trained workforce from which businesses like yours can draw employees in the future?
- What do we need to do to ensure that young people understand what it means to be a good employee?
- How often are you able to meet with young people to listen to their ideas or to share information about how to take advantage of employment opportunities in the community?

Neighborhood Representatives

- What do you think is the prevailing perception of young people in this community?
- Do you believe that perception of young people is accurate,

and if not, what contributes to the continuation of this erroneous view of youth?

- What strategies do you think are necessary to shift any negative perceptions of youth?
- How can the community better promote the positive contributions of its young people?
- How can the community better support and engage in service all its young people?
- What are the chief obstacles to youth involvement in the community?
- What do you think the community needs to do to help young people learn what it is to be a good neighbor and a good citizen?
- How often are you able to spend time with young people listening to their ideas about how the community might better support and engage them?

Leaders of Parent Organizations

- What do you think is the prevailing perception of young people in this community?
- What strategies do you think are necessary to shift any negative perceptions of youth?
- What changes do you think are needed to ensure that the young people from the families you represent can achieve positive outcomes?
- What changes do you think are necessary to create a more supportive environment for all of the community's young people and their families?
- How often are you able to meet with young people to listen to their suggestions about how your organization can support and engage them?

School Administrators

- What do you think is the public perception of how this community's young people are achieving academically?
- What strategies do you think are necessary to shift any negative perceptions about young people's academic performance?
- What are the factors in the community that are affecting how students perform academically?
- What type of supports do young people need to perform academically, and how can the community facilitate a process through which youth receive those supports?
- What do you think is needed to help the community invest in and share responsibility for young people's academic success with the schools?
- How often are you able to meet with young people to listen to their ideas about methods for improving community educational opportunities?

University and College Administrators and Faculty

- What unmet needs do students have on entering the college or university that might be addressed before they enter the institution to improve their success in the academic arena?
- What type of university-sponsored research might be undertaken that would promote greater understanding of young people, their needs, and their contributions?
- What type of opportunities does the university provide to students to prepare them for working with youth and families, both as professionals and community members?
- How often are you able to meet with the next generation of college students to hear their ideas and share information on the benefits of secondary education?

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Engaging Key Leaders
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Media Personnel

- What do you think is the prevailing perception of young people in this community?
- How do you think the media has contributed to that perception?
- What strategies might the media undertake to help shift any negative perceptions of youth?
- How might youth service professionals work with the media to help engage younger readers/viewers/listeners and encourage their involvement in the community?
- How often are you able to meet with young people to solicit their input about how to better cover stories relevant to youth and families?

Additional Resources From NCFY

The National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) can provide youth service professionals with information to use as they begin to dialog with leaders of professional groups and community institutions. See the NCFY Web site <http://www.ncfy.com> or call NCFY at (301) 608-8098.

Designing Sound Youth Policy

Over the years, juvenile justice and youth policy researchers and practitioners have defined what all youth need to move successfully through adolescence to adulthood. That definition today forms the basis for the youth development approach. In turn, there is a consensus among most experts and practitioners that youth development principles are the basis for sound youth policy. Community systems that build on young people's strengths rather than focusing on their deficits, therefore, include the following key components:

- Prevention activities that help youth understand how certain behaviors can negatively affect their future
- Parenting education for all parents and support for families that are addressing specific problems such as domestic violence or a lack of resources and access to opportunities
- Easily accessible services to support youth during challenging times
- Effective protective systems that monitor young people's safety and ensure swift intervention when they are at risk of abuse or neglect
- Educational systems that allow for the different learning styles of young people and provide mentoring for those who experience special challenges
- Adult support and guidance through recreational and other activities in which youth learn and develop their social skills
- Opportunities for youth to contribute to the greater community while building skills and competencies
- Early intervention with youth who engage in acting-out behaviors that are symptomatic of problems that likely are beyond their capacity to address
- Communitywide support for the provision of resources designed to support young people, strengthen families, and rebuild neighborhoods

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its promise of a lifeline for our most vulnerable young people.

I'm reminded of a true story Will Rogers liked to tell. Rogers often spoke about a famous congressman who prepared a speech but didn't have a chance to deliver it. Greatly distressed, he asked that his oration be printed in the Congressional Record.

The speech contained all kinds of promises for a better, brighter future. The congressman was so certain that he was writing for the ages that he actually wrote the word "applause" in the text everywhere he thought he'd get one. Unfortunately, the young printer couldn't read the congressman's handwriting. So every time he saw the word applause, he wrote "applesauce."

I like that story because it nicely sums up what Americans think about political promises—they're as solid as applesauce. But some promises are just too important not to keep—like a promise that every young person can grow up safe and secure. That's why I was so proud to announce last Monday that we've requested an additional 5 million dollars—that's a 33-percent increase—for the Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth. And that's why I'm so happy to join all of you here today. Because all of you are on the frontlines—working tirelessly to provide services that vulnerable young people and their families need. Because, as your [National Network for Youth] symposium title suggests, you're helping young people by strengthening the ties between communities, youth, and families. And because—to paraphrase the poet—when it comes to keeping that promise of safety and security for all of our youth, we still have miles to go.

But we simply cannot … return to the days when runaways were treated like criminals.

It's true that most American young people are prospering today. And it's true that some adolescents run away from home because of the garden-variety teenage rebellion. But we still have miles to go when so many kids are forced to flee troubled homes. We still have miles to go when so many runaway, throwaway, and homeless kids have been scarred by years of physical violence or emotional neglect. And we still have miles to go when so many youth—like a lot of the young people in our audience—have stories like John's.

John was one of five children in a poor and troubled Pennsylvania family. For years, his parents abused his body and attacked his spirit. Then, a week before his 13th birthday, without warning his parents threw him out of the house and told him to never come back. For 2 years, John bounced around a number of uncaring foster homes and indifferent institutions. Finally, a social worker took a real interest in John and referred him to Valley Youth House in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, Valley Youth House provided John with something he had never had—a community of adults who cared, who listened, and who tried to understand. Neglect turned to nurturing. Sadness became self-esteem. And where there was once only pain, there were now possibilities. John was able to move ahead with his life, and today he has a master's degree from Lehigh University.

I tell that story not because all of you aren't familiar with people like John but because it speaks to five challenges we face today. They're five challenges to helping runaway and homeless youth. They're five challenges that government cannot meet alone. And they're five challenges that we must meet if we want to keep our promise that every young

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person can grow up in the safety and security God intended.

Our first challenge is to reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act—and we must reauthorize it in a form that will help our communities help kids like John—because we need this act now more than ever. We know that the number of runaways has remained relatively stable, with an estimated 500,000 to 1.5 million leaving or being forced out of their homes each year and 200,000 homeless and living on the streets, but the problem is worse than it was 25 years ago for three reasons.

First, shelter directors, researchers, and other experts agree that the problems that cause many young people to run away—including drug and alcohol abuse in their homes—have grown more severe in the past 15 years. One earlier study by the National Association of Social Workers showed that two-thirds of all runaways who seek shelter have been physically or sexually abused. No wonder the Executive Director of the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services remarked that for too many young people, "The streets start looking pretty good."

And as the problems at home have grown more severe, over the past two decades we've also witnessed a loss of community and of community involvement. At one time, an adolescent like John who was experiencing abuse or other problems at home could turn to neighbors, youth organizations, or schools. But as the concluding report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development stressed, there has been an erosion of traditional support systems and neighborhood networks. It concludes that "young people from all economic strata often find themselves alone in communities where there are few adults to turn to and hardly any safe places to go." Where once we had front porches, we now have back decks—so the cry for help too often goes unnoticed, unheard, and unanswered.

We know that runaways are best served in community-based programs … that support youth development ….

The final reason the problem is more severe today is that runaway and homeless youth face health risks on the streets like AIDS and new antibiotic resistant strains of tuberculosis that were unheard of 25 years ago.

Given the situation, we certainly need the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Of course, this act is only one component of the larger Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. And as debate over the reauthorization of the entire act continues, we must make it our business to ensure that one of its central mandates—that runaways will not be placed in detention facilities—is not overturned.

There's a growing, and I think well-intentioned, parental rights movement that wants youth held in secure facilities. But we simply cannot, and must not, turn back the clock and return to the days when runaways were treated like criminals. We know that runaways are best served in community-based programs—programs that support youth development and programs like the ones so many of you are running. These facilities are less expensive to operate than detention centers. They are much more likely to give youth the support and attention they need. And they can best support family reunification. When it comes to runaway and homeless youth, our policy must always be prevention and intervention—but never detention.

But as we work to help kids who have already fled to shelters or the streets, the best way to prevent young people from leaving in the first place is to aid troubled families. Helping troubled

families like John's is our second challenge. And it's why the President has asked for 295 million dollars in the fiscal year 2000 budget for the "Promoting Safe and Stable Families" program. This initiative gives child welfare agencies and Native American tribes funding for family support, preservation, and reunification services.

Of course, the best way to help troubled families is to help every family, every day, everywhere—and that's exactly what this President and this Administration have worked to do. We've expanded economic opportunities by passing the Family and Medical Leave Act, raising the minimum wage, and extending the Earned Income Tax Credit. We've adopted the historic Children's Health Insurance Program to cover millions of children from working families who have no health care coverage. And the President's fiscal year 2000 budget proposes the largest investment in child care in our Nation's history. These measures will help all of our families cope with the pressures and problems that can create an unhealthy environment for youth.

But as I said before, this isn't a job for government alone. All of you who are at ground zero in our communities need to continue your efforts to help families so that kids won't feel they have to leave home in the first place or that they can't go home again.

But sometimes, despite all of our efforts, some families—like John's—may be just too broken to be mended. As one continually bruised and battered 15-year-old in New York State announced at a runaway shelter, "I'll go anyplace but home." So our third challenge is to give young people who have no choice but to leave their homes a safe place to go to.

We need to convince others that our young people are everyone's responsibility.

We need to provide more emergency shelter beds and more long-term options in our communities. That's why the President's fiscal year 2000 budget requests 79 million dollars for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. As most of you are aware, this program provides grants for communities to provide temporary shelter, outreach, and other services.

And as I noted earlier, that's why we've requested an additional 5 million dollars—a 33-percent increase—for the Transitional Living Program. Last week at a White House event, I met with a number of youth who were once homeless and on the streets, and I heard story after story about the difference that transitional living programs made in so many of their lives. By providing these additional funds to community-based organizations for residential care and life skills training, this increase will help many more runaway and homeless youth ages 16–21 make the transition to independent living. And it will help keep our promise that all young people can grow up safe and secure. Now we just need Congress to fund it.

But it's really not enough to simply give kids a safe place to go to. The key to John's success at Valley Youth House was finding an environment where adults worked hard to care for him and to understand him. And that leads to our fourth challenge: we must try to understand our runaway and homeless youth. According to one social worker in Phoenix, the most common complaint she hears from young people is that their case workers and advocates don't really understand what they've been through or what they're going through. When dealing with runaways and homeless kids, we must ensure that we're listening—talking with them and not at them. We must ensure that

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their concerns and their voices are being heard. And we must ensure that we don't simply react to their situation but try to find how they'd like us to help.

But there's also another component to understanding. All of us, especially you young people who have been in the shelters and on the streets, have to help change inaccurate perceptions about runaways. Mention the word "runaway" and too many people still picture Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer floating down the Mississippi, searching for adventure. But we know that the life of a runaway often reads less like an adventure novel and more like a horror story—sleeping in doorways and under bridges, not knowing where the next meal is coming from, getting thrown out of bus stations when they close. We know that running away is usually a desperate cry for help. And we know that, according to a study done by my Department, more than half the youth we questioned living in shelters or on the streets reported that their parents told them to leave or didn't care they were gone. As a society, we cannot turn our backs on these kids, and as a member of this Administration, I'm here to tell you we won't.

And that brings me to my fifth and final challenge: our young people must be everybody's responsibility. The National Network for Youth recognizes this in its philosophy that "youth need the support that comes from an entire community." And Colin Powell speaks to this when he says that one of the things that saved him from the street is what he calls, "the aunt net." He said, "When I went off to school each morning, I had an aunt in every other house, stationed at the window with eyes peeled, ready to spot the slightest misbehavior on my part and report it back to my parents." He added, "The Internet pales in comparison to the aunt net." We need that kind of interest, involvement, and commitment from adults today.

I'm reminded that Julia Ward Howe, who wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic, once asked Senator Charles Sumner to help a certain mother and her children. The Senator sighed and said, "Julia, I've become so busy that I can no longer concern myself with individuals." Without missing a beat, Howe replied, "Charles, I find that quite remarkable. Even God isn't that busy."

I realize that I'm preaching to the choir because all of you here certainly make everyone's children your responsibility. We need to convince others that our young people are everyone's responsibility. We need to get everyone in America to follow your lead. And we need to work together to weave a safety net for all of our youth, because no private or public program can ever help a young person or save a young person by itself—it takes the human touch of caring people like you.

I've no doubt we can weave that safety net, and fulfill the promise that every young person can grow up safe and secure, if we meet the five challenges that John's story speaks to. And we must do it not just for our youth but for ourselves and our Nation. Because today's young people will define our Nation's greatness in the 21st century. Who knows what future promise these young people hold? And who knows what future course they may one day chart? They may discover new paths to better health, they may map a new route to understanding the origins of the universe, or they may blaze new trails in the global struggle for peace and equality. But right now, their fate and their future is very much in our hands. When it comes to our young people—all of our young people, including our runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth—we must always be willing to stand up, to speak up, and to never give up."